

HOUSE BILL REPORT

2SSB 6016

As Reported by House Committee On:

Early Learning & Children's Services

Appropriations

Title: An act relating to good cause reasons for failure to participate in WorkFirst program components.

Brief Description: Concerning good cause reasons for failure to participate in WorkFirst program components.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Ways & Means (originally sponsored by Senators Regala and Kohl-Welles).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Early Learning & Children's Services: 3/29/07 [DPA];

Appropriations: 3/31/07 [DPA(APP w/o ELCS)s].

Brief Summary of Second Substitute Bill (As Amended by House Committee)

- Revises participation requirements under WorkFirst for a parent with a child under the age of one year.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 5 members: Representatives Kagi, Chair; Walsh, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Appleton, Pettigrew and Roberts.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 1 member: Representative Haler, Ranking Minority Member.

Staff: Sydney Forrester (786-7120).

Background:

WorkFirst is Washington's program of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Under WorkFirst, recipients of public assistance are assessed prior to referral to job search

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activities. Information obtained through the assessment is used to develop an individual responsibility plan (IRP) that includes an employment goal; a plan for obtaining employment as quickly as possible; and a description of services available to enable the recipient to obtain and keep employment.

Unless a good cause exemption applies, recipients of public assistance must be engaged in work or work activities as a condition of continued eligibility. Good cause exemptions include situations where necessary child care is unavailable for an incapacitated or dependent child under age six, and situations where a parent has a child under one year of age. State law allows a parent to claim the exemption for parenting a child under one year only once for one child. Federal regulations permit applying this exemption up to a maximum of 12 months for the individual's lifetime.

For a recipient claiming a good cause exemption due to parenting a child under one year of age, an assessment is conducted to determine specific service needs or employment barriers, including substance abuse treatment, mental health treatment, or domestic violence services. Information from the assessment is used in developing the parent's IRP.

Beginning when the child is three months old, the parent is required to participate in one or more specified activities for up to 20 hours per week. These activities include: parenting skills instruction or training; job readiness training; high-school diploma or general educational development (GED) certificate courses; or volunteering in a licensed child-care facility.

Summary of Amended Bill:

For a parent claiming a good cause exemption due to parenting a child under one year of age, the requirement to participate in certain specified activities when the child reaches three months of age is replaced with a general requirement to participate up to 20 hours per week in mental health, alcohol or drug treatment, or domestic violence services if such treatment or service is indicated by a comprehensive evaluation.

The one-time one-child limit on claiming a good cause exemption for parenting a child under the age of one year is removed, and the federal regulation permitting use of this good cause exemption for a maximum total of 12 months over an individual's lifetime will limit its use.

Amended Bill Compared to Second Substitute Bill:

Restores the original bill language removing the requirement for participation in specified WorkFirst activities by the parent of a child between the ages of three and 12 months who is claiming the good cause exemption from participation.

Requires a parent claiming a good cause exemption due to parenting a child under the age of one year to cooperate with mental health, alcohol or drug treatment, or domestic violence services up to 20 hours per week if such treatment or services are indicated by a comprehensive assessment.

Maintains the language in the original, substitute, and second substitute bills removing the one-time one-child limitation on invoking a good cause exemption from WorkFirst activities due to parenting a child under the age of one year. The federal limit of 12 months over an individuals' lifetime will govern use of the exemption.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on March 29, 2007.

Effective Date of Amended Bill: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) The first year of a child's life is an important and critical time for parental bonding. Infant child care is very expensive and often very hard to find. Until we roll out a Quality Rating and Improvement System the quality is not always of the level that very young children need. This bill is practical and very complementary to the work being done on early learning initiatives.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Lonnie Johns-Brown, Washington Association for the Education of Young Children.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Majority Report: Do pass as amended by Committee on Appropriations and without amendment by Committee on Early Learning & Children's Services. Signed by 22 members: Representatives Sommers, Chair; Dunshee, Vice Chair; Cody, Conway, Darneille, Ericks, Fromhold, Grant, Haigh, Hunt, Hunter, Kagi, Kenney, Kessler, Linville, McDonald, McIntire, Morrell, Pettigrew, Schual-Berke, Seaquist and P. Sullivan.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Alexander, Ranking Minority Member; Bailey, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Haler, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Anderson, Buri, Chandler, Dunn, Kretz and Priest.

Staff: Amy Skei (786-7140).

Summary of Recommendation of Committee On Appropriations Compared to Recommendation of Committee On Early Learning & Children's Services:

The bill as amended by the Appropriations Committee adds parenting classes to the list of services in which an individual may be required to participate in when exercising the good cause exemption due to raising a child under the age of 12 months. The bill as amended by

the Appropriations Committee establishes a 12-month lifetime limit on the length of time an individual may receive a good cause exemption due to raising a child under the age of 12 months.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on April 2, 2007.

Effective Date of Amended Bill: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Infant child care is very expensive and is difficult to find. We cannot guarantee that what is available is of high quality. That should be of concern because we recognize these early months are critical months for learning. The federal government allows states to utilize the full 12 month lifetime exemption and count it as an allowable activity. This has not changed under the recent federal changes. Moving from three months to 12 months is compatible with encouraging good education outcomes for our children.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Lonnie Johns-Brown, Washington Association for the Education of Young Children.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.